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23 October 1963

SUBJECT : Sequence of CAS Contacts with Vietnamese Generals,
23 August through 23 October 1963

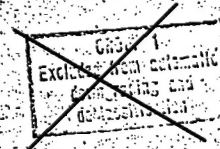
23 August CAS officer meets with General Tran Van Don, Acting Chief of Staff, Vietnamese Armed Forces. General Don states Generals had participated in decision to impose martial law. Don implies further developments of which the imposition of martial law is the first step but refuses to reveal succeeding steps. Don discusses alternatives to Diem but rejects present political exiles as feasible alternative.

25 August Brigadier General Nguyen Khanh, Commanding General II Corps, contacts CAS officer in Saigon. General Khanh states generals fear Ngo family thinking of accommodation with DRV, and if this proves true generals will act. General Khanh requests statement of U.S. position.

26 August Ambassador Lodge and General Harbois propose first CAS convey word of new U.S. position to generals. As first step, General Tran Tuyen Khiem, Chief of Staff, Joint General Staff and General Nguyen Khanh chosen for contact. Following nine points are decided as basis for approach to generals:

- a. Solicitation of further elaboration of action aspects of present thinking and planning. What should be done?
- b. Agreement Diem's must go.
- c. Question of retaining Diem or not left up to generals.
- d. Boudes and other arrestees must be released immediately and five-point agreement of 16 June be fully carried out.
- e. U.S. cannot be of any help during initial action of assuming power of the state. Entirely their own action, win or lose. Don't expect be bailed out.
- f. U.S. will provide direct support during any interim period of breakdown central government mechanism.

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- g. If Nhu's do not go and if Buddhist situation is not redressed as indicated, we would find it impossible continue military and economic support.
- h. It hoped bloodshed can be avoided or reduced to absolute minimum.
- i. It hoped that during process and after, developments conducted in such manner as to retain and increase the necessary relations between Vietnamese and Americans which will allow for progress of country and successful prosecution of the war.

25 August General Khiem contacted and acquainted with above points. Khiem states that generals are in accord with these points and that CAS officer should discuss them with General Duong Van Minh, Military Advisor to President. General Khiem concurs in similar contact with General Khanh by CAS officer.

26 August General Khanh contacted at Pleiku. Khanh states he not yet ready to move but awaiting indications Nhu preparing rapprochement with DRV. Requests protection for families of Generals in the event decision for action.

27 August General Khiem again contacted and states that the question of a military coup had been discussed by a committee of generals headed by General "Big" Minh and they are agreed a coup will occur within one week. General Khiem receives assurances that all possible steps will be taken to assist the families of generals in the event of failure of the coup.

28 August General Khiem during brief contact with CAS officer makes arrangements for meeting between CAS officers and General "Big" Minh on 29 August.

29 August Generals "Big" Minh and Khiem contacted by CAS officers. General Minh asked for token of U. S. determination to support coup group and stated that token should be a severance of economic aid in order to force Nhu's hand. No specific response was given to his request for a cut in economic aid.

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- 29 August Major General Le Van Kim and oppositionist Dai Viet politician Bui Thiem seek out Mr. Rufus Phillips, USOM, and request specific verification that meeting between General Minh and CAS officers had Ambassador Lodge's approval. Mr. Phillips discusses this with the Ambassador and is told to inform General Kim that approach was bona fide and had Ambassador's complete blessing. This assurance passed to General Kim later on 29 August.
- 29 August British MI-6 station chief in Saigon informs CAS officer of report that Diem government will begin arrest of generals within twenty-four hours. General Kim contacted at his home by CAS officer and asked to pass on warning to General "Big" Minh. General Kim agrees to do this.
- 31 August General Harkins meets with General Thiem. General Thiem states ARVN generals were not ready as they did not have enough forces under their control.
- 31 August Mr. Phillips meets General Kim who takes same line.
- 4 September Contact with General Ton That Dinh at his initiative. General Dinh in highly agitated state made vague threats against anyone attempting to encroach upon his powers. No specific points raised by Dinh. Over-all impression from meeting was Dinh highly emotional with grandiose estimate of his own influence.
- 16 September General Thiem requested a meeting at which he stated that the generals still had a plan and that they were growing more and more concerned over the possibility of a reconciliation between North and South Vietnam sponsored by Ngo Dinh Nhu. The general told of requests made to President Diem for the Cabinet posts of Defense, Interior, psychological Warfare and Education; the generals having asked for these to be assigned to military men.
- 26 September Meeting with General Thiem at his request. He stated that General "Big" Minh had directed that meetings be held in order to keep contacts open with American community. He stated no coup would be mounted until Diem's answer to Cabinet posts demands mentioned 14 September had been

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received. General Kiem cited growing Viet Cong strength, stated he felt that would force Diem to accede to generals' demands for Cabinet posts.

- 2 October Accidental meeting with General Don who said he had been trying to establish contact for some time. Requested meeting later that day at Nha Trang.
- 2 October Meeting with General Don which had been cleared with DCM Trueheart. General Don stated "Big" Minh wanted a 5 October meeting. Added that generals had a specific plan.
- 5 October Meeting with General "Big" Minh which had been approved by the Ambassador. (CAS was instructed to elicit information, to be non-committal re coup plans and not to speculate on U. S. policy.) General Minh requested U. S. position on a coup, asking assurances such a plan would not be thwarted. He outlined three possible plans for a coup which were
- a. Assassination of Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can, retaining President Diem
 - b. Encirclement of Saigon by military units
 - c. Direct confrontation between military units in Saigon
- CAS officer non-committal in his reply to Minh's request for assurances. Minh indicated his understanding of this. Stated he would contact CAS for subsequent meeting.
- 5 October In course of routine liaison contact, CAS met with General Kiem. His impression was that Kiem was getting cold feet, wanting to take by-stander role if any coup attempts still being planned.
- 10 October CAS officer contacted by Vietnamese citizen who had been previously agreed upon as a message passer. General Don had made this suggestion as a way of establishing an alternate means of communication between himself and

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CAS officers. The message was that on the night of 13 October at a reception given by General Markins for Ambassador Lodge, either General Don or General Minh would approach the Ambassador and ask if CAS officer (Colonel Conain) spoke with authority. The Ambassador was informed and agreed to answer this question affirmatively. (At 15 October reception both Generals Don and Minh were present; no mention was made of Colonel Conain.)

15 October

Meeting with General Don at his initiative. General Don upset by recent meeting with General Markins at which the latter had asked General Don to stop the coup plotting of one of his subordinate colonels. General Don demanded to know the answer to his previous questions with respect to U. S. attitude toward a coup. CAS officer replied, speaking on instruction that U. S. would not thwart a change of government or deny support to a new regime if it appeared capable of increasing effectiveness of military effort, assuring popular support to win the war, and improving working relationships with U. S. CAS officer asked General Don to produce proof that the generals' coup committee existed. General Don replied that plans were well advanced and that he would seek permission on 24 October to hand to CAS officers the generals' political organization plan. A meeting is scheduled at 1900 hours, 24 October in order to receive this plan.

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